DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 095 493 CS 001 291

AUTHOR Downing, John
TITLE A Cross-National Investigation of Cultural and Linguistic Mismatch in Fourteen Countries.
PUB DATE Oct 73
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Wrold Federation for Mental Health Anniversary World Mental Health Congress (25th, Sydney, Australia, October 8-12, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Processes; *Cross Cultural Studies; *Cultural Factors; *Language Skills; Linguistics; Reading; *Reading Development; Reading Instruction; *Reading Research; Reading Skills

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a Comparative Reading project that was conducted in 14 countries. The 14 countries included India, Germany, U.S.S.R., Great Britain, Israel, U.S.A., Finland, Japan, Hong Kong, France, Denmark, Argentina, Norway, and Sweden. The contents include: "The Significance of Culture," which discusses the value which various cultures place on literacy, sex roles in literacy acquisition, and cultural priorities; "Cultural and Linguistic Mismatch," which looks at the child's progress in reading and its relationship to his understanding of linguistic concepts, a model depicting the child's situation when he undertakes the task of literacy acquisition, research related to cognitive reactions and linguistic mismatch, culture and emotion, and dialects; and "Conclusion," which emphasizes the importance of the school and educators adapting to the child's world as he perceives it through the child's culture and the child's own language. (WR)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 095493

Paper prepared for the World Federation for Mental Health

25th Anniversary World Mental Health Congress

Sydney, Australia, 8-12 October 1973

A CROSS-NATIONAL INVESTIGATION OF CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC MISMATCH IN FOURTEEN COUNTRIES

John Downing

University of Victoria, Canada

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY John Downing

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

A recent article on the mental health of Mexican-Americans written by Ramirez (1972) asserts: "Mental health institutions and personnel in general have been insensitive to cultural differences. Cultural differences have been given little consideration in development of personality theories, psychotherapeutic strategies, and psychological tests." Instead of recognizing that differences in behavior may be culturally determined and quite normal for their culture, such behavior "has often been interpreted as the product of poverty or disadvantage. Thus value differences which should be respected are not given adequate consideration by the institution in theory or in practice."

Ramirez's criticism certainly applies to educational institutions. Schools in many countries have ignored the legitimate cultural differences of their students, particularly their different languages or dialects. For years Spanish-speaking children in California, for example, were diagnosed as intellectually inferior because they failed to acquire literacy in English--a language which they did not speak or understand!

CS 001 891

The investigation to be discussed here was concerned with this educational aspect of mental health. It is assumed that in societies where literacy is expected as a part of normal functioning, then failure to become functionally literate represents a problem of mental ill-health. The school's chief concern in this connection is with literacy hygiene--to provide an environment in which the child will succeed in learning to read and write. The school is also concerned with the treatment of disabilities or disorders in literacy development. Sometimes this treatment is provided in the school, sometimes in special clinics or other centers. But the chief concern of our investigation was to obtain new insights in literacy hygiene by applying for the first time on a large scale the cross-cultural method of research.

This research had its beginnings in a paper on "Comparative Reading" which this author (Downing, 1968) presented at the International Reading Association convention in 1968. It was noted in it that Husén and Postlethwaite (1967) had stated the following regarding international studies of mathematics training:

> "The school systems of the world represent a series of environments in which human beings learn, and, as a group, are much more varied and contain far greater differences than can be found or created in any one system. Thus educational 'laboratory' situations exist in which many of the more profound questions concerning human growth can be studied objectively."

It was emphasized that these considerations apply with even greater force in literacy learning where cross-national research often implies <u>cross-language</u> comparisons also.

Jahoda (1970) and Goody (1968) have studied the effects of the growth of literacy on society, but clearly the relationship between literacy development and social change must be a two way process. The investigation to be reported here has been focussed more on the influence of culture on literacy learning, although the interacting relationship is recognized. Our goal has been to seek the universals and idiosyncracies of the literacy learner's experience in different cultures. A long term aim is the hope that this comparative method may throw light on the essential psycholinguistic processes of learning to read and write. A more immediate goal is to remove the ethnocentric blinkers which narrow the educator's view of the processes of reading and of learning to read.

The limitations of our study must be recognized. It can be regarded only as an initial "clearing of the decks" - a kind of hypothesis-seeking phase. Hopefully the report to be published shortly (Downing, 1973) will provoke better studies in this new field of investigation.

METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

Fourteen countries were chosen as examples of important cultural and linguistic differences in literacy learning. For example, India and Germany provide contrasts in economic as well as cultural background. The U.S.S.R., Great Britain and Israel supplied different alphabets. The U.S.A. and Finland exemplified the contrast between irregular and regular grapheme-phoneme relations in languages coded with the Roman alphabet. Japan and Hong Kong gave us examples of syllabic and

logographic writing systems for comparison with the alphabetic systems. France and Denmark allowed a marked contrast in educational patterns. Argentina, Norway and Sweden extended these comparisons into other aspects of culture and language.

For each of these countries one or two specialists in the study of literacy learning in that culture were commissioned to write a descriptive account. These specialists were given some general headings for their report in an attempt to ensure that certain topics known to be of common concern would be comparable across the fourteen countries. But, this guidance was deliberately minimal because a large degree of open-endedness was desirable to allow each national specialist to stress spontaneously what he considered to be the important aspects of literacy learning behaviour in the country he described.

In addition to these studies of the individual cultures, four other tasks were undertaken:

(1) M. Alan Brimer of the University of Bristol, England, who is a member of the IEA (International Educational Achievements) team contributed a paper on the methodological problems involved in conducting cross-cultural studies of literacy attainments.

(2) Gaston E. Blom and J. Lawrence Wiberg, two psychiatrists at the University of Colorado Medical Center wrote a special report of their cross-cultural comparisons of the attitudinal content of children's reading primers.

(3) The present writer reviewed previous cross-cultural research on this problem.

(4) The final task, undertaken also by this present author, was the analysis of all the data from the fourteen countries plus the three special studies mentioned in the previous paragraph.

The work proved very fruitful. Indeed, it has been difficult to contain all the findings in a volume of 600 pages. For this conference of the World Federation for Mental Health, we have summarized some of the more important of the results for the literacy hygiene aspect of mental health.

RESULTS - I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURE

The "Comparative Reading" project produced evidence that culture is indeed an important factor in the child's experiences in literacy learning.

The Value Accorded to Literacy

Cultures differ in the value which they place on literacy. In Germany reading is "not considered to be a serious problem." From Finland, it was reported that there were only eighteen full-time special teachers for treating cases of reading disability. In Norway it hardly occurs to anyone to be anxious about reading. The contrast between these more relaxed attitudes in Germany, Finland and Norway and the much greater anxiety found in the United States is remarkable. All facets of the American child's educational environment display the tangible results of the deepest and most extensive national concern for the improvement of reading. The "Right to Read" campaign is only one example of this continuing anxiety over the child's duty to learn to read. Clearly, this difference in the value which a culture places on

literacy must have a corresponding difference in the degree of pressure placed on the young child at home as well as at school.

It might be argued that the American anxiety about reading is based on the reality of special problems of population or language. The Japanese neuropsychiatrist, Makita (1968) believes that the seriousness of the reading problem in the United States is caused by the complexity and irregularity of the English writing system. However, French has a similar difficulty but though reading disability is rampant in France no great anxiety is expressed about the problem. Furthermore, the Japanese report also indicates that a high value is placed on literacy there although there appears to be no serious incidence of failure. "Excessive readers" even are considered to be a problem in Japan. Thus, a national emphasis on reading may not necessarily arise from difficulties in acquiring the skill. Another reality explanation could be the problem of bilingualism and dialects found in the United States. But the same problem exists, for example, in Argentina, where it causes educational difficulties, too - but without arousing much anxiety.

Sex Roles in Literacy Acquisition

It has been a consistent finding in American research on reading that girls are superior to boys in the early development of this skill. But this "Comparative Reading" study finds that this is not the case in all countries.

In Britain some studies confirm the American finding that girls are superior to boys, but the carefully conducted official national

surveys and Joyce Morris' (1966) important investigation found, if anything, that boys were ahead. Morris did report that more boys than girls were placed in special groups for retarded readers, but this is probably due to teachers' attitudes toward boy failures.

In Germany, Preston (1962) found boys were superior. Statistics on literacy in India show a much higher proportion of males than females achieve literacy, 35 and 13 per cent, respectively. Abiri's (1969) large-scale reading experiment in Nigeria found that Yoruba boys achieved superior results to those of the girls.

The cultural causation may be traced as follows. In the "Comparative Reading" report on India it is stated that "Social causes are also an important factor in girls dropping out of school - betrothal, and the unwillingness of parents to send grown-up girls to a mixed school." In Nigeria, too, girls have poorer school attendance records than boys. As Downing and Thackray (1971) noted, in that country "if some chore needs doing around the homestead, the girl is kept at home to do it, while the boy is allowed to go to school." The poorer attendance of girls at school in India and Nigeria than that of boys would explain the boys' superior achievements in reading in those countries, but the important point to note is that the girls' poorer attendance is determined by cultural factors.

This suggests the hypothesis that the opposite result in countries such as the United States may also have a cultural basis. It is a matter of popular comment that American boys are expected and thereby encouraged to spend more time and energy on large muscle activities, whereas sedentary types of behaviour are thought to be more proper for

girls. Furthermore, girls are expected to speak "better" than boys, and this "better" language is more like the formal "good" English found in their school reading primers. An American father approves of his daughter reading a book, but if his son indulges too much in reading he is more inclined to ask him why he is not out playing a ball game. Yet another cultural factor is the teaching of American school beginners almost exclusively by women. Boys may find it less appropriate to identify with their women teacher's behaviour. All these factors in American culture may readily account for the general superiority of girls in learning to read in the United States. At the very least, it seems clear that, if there are any innate constitutional differences between girls and boys that affect their development of language and reading skills, they can be outweighed by cultural factors, as they must have been in countries like Germany, Nigeria, and India.

Cultural Priorities

Sometimes a more overriding aim puts literacy in a position of less importance. In three countries in the "Comparative Reading" project the teaching of reading is put in the perspective of the total mental health of the child. In Norway, great importance is attached to the child's "school readiness" (not "reading" readiness). Children who are not ready for school may not begin until 8 years of age. Even the normal age for admission is late compared with other countries (in Great Britain 5 is the legal age of entry and there are no school-readiness provisions). Children under 7 in Norway may apply to come to school earlier, but only after medical and psychological examination.

If this proves them to be sufficiently mature for school work, they may be permitted to start school in the year they reach their sixth birthday. Norwegian educators emphasize also that school must give the child "a relaxed and cautious start" in reading. Similar attitudes seem to prevail in Denmark where grade I begins at age 7, and the principle applied at all levels is that the central concern must be the learner as a whole person, not some limited segment of his development, such as reading. School readiness is an important feature of education in Sweden, also. Seven is the normal starting age, but, if school readiness tests show the child to be too immature for school, entry can be postponed until he is 8. Earlier entry is possible, but only in very unusual cases and only if the child has a tested developmental age of at least 7 years - intellectually, emotionally, and physically. The weight given to the basic motive underlying these practices in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden is indicated by the following comments by the Swedish expert in the "Comparative Reading" project:

> "The risk that an 'underaged' child will fail in his first contact with schoolwork is otherwise considered to be too great. It is extremely important for the personality development and mental health of the child that the contact with the school be positive from the very beginning."
>
> "The school must allow them a calm and cautious start in reading. It pays to 'waste time' by using a very quiet and slow tempo and a very careful and richly varied method in the early learning stages. Growth in reading cannot be hurried above capacity level without some fatal and far-extending effects. The total personality development of the child may be hurt."

While it is true that many psychologists and educators in other countries may agree with this Swedish recommendation, their views more often represent a minority opinion. For example, currently in the

United States, there is increasing pressure to introduce formal instruction in reading at earlier and earlier ages in kindergarten or pre-school institutions. Furthermore, American school systems are ready to hand over responsibility for such activities to outside contractors whose financial profits are determined by children's reading-test scores. This seems clear evidence of the remarkable difference in national educational values that exist between the United States and such countries as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden in this respect. Of course, there is danger in such generalizations and the present pressure for early reading achievements in the United States is opposed by some American educators. For example, Goodman (1971) writes ironically that "As long as the ends are spelled out in behavioral goals and the contractor promises to achieve these goals, never mind the bed-wetting, self-esteem, anti-social acts, or effects on other areas of learning." However, such protests have not prevented "accountability" and "performance contracting" from spreading relentlessly in American education with little concern being shown for the nonperformance mental health outcomes stressed by Goodman.

In summary, despite individual differences in the attitudes of people within each nation, the fact remains that pressures on the child to learn literacy skills are much greater in some countries than others. There are clear indications that this is based on cultural values. In the scale of values reading gets a higher priority in some cultures than it does in others. The risk of emotional disturbance due to pressure to learn to read at an early age is considered seriously in some countries but is more or less disregarded in others.

We conclude that culture is an important variable in literacy hygiene. The child's psychological experiences of the tasks of learning the skills of reading and writing are likely to vary considerably from one culture to another. His cognitive and affective development are likely to be influenced accordingly.

RESULTS - II. CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC MISMATCH

Literacy development is postulated to be a problem-solving process similar to that involved in learning mathematics. The child begins in an initial state of cognitive confusion regarding the nature and purpose of the tasks of reading and writing. He gropes his way out of this confusion mainly by solving a series of conceptual learning problems which yield increasing cognitive clarity. For example, he must develop concepts for such categories as "word", "phoneme", "syllable", "letter", "character", etc. according to the language and its coding units in the writing system. He must understand the concept of "a code" in which one symbol can represent another, as well as the concepts of the units of language used in the particular code he is required to learn. Although the child's language and the writing system to be learned vary widely in the countries represented in the "Comparative Reading" project, over and over again the same basic problem is revealed, i.e., the child's progress is essentially related to his improvement in understanding such linguistic concepts. Of prime importance is his need to learn the communicative and expressive purposes of literacy. This is a universal starting point across cultures and languages.

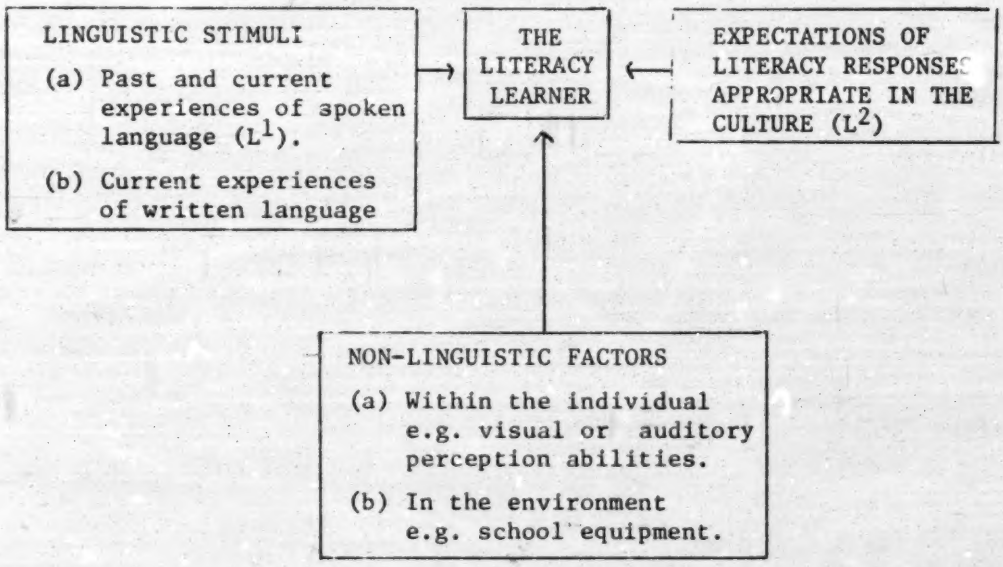
But, as has been shown in the previous section, cultures vary in

11a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FIGURE 1

THE CHILD'S SITUATION IN LEARNING TO READ


LINGUISTIC STIMULI
(a) Past and current experiences of spoken language (L^1).
(b) Current experiences of written language
THE LITERACY LEARNER
EXPECTATIONS OF LITERACY RESPONSES APPROPRIATE IN THE CULTURE (L^2)
NON-LINGUISTIC FACTORS
(a) Within the individual e.g. visual or auditory perception abilities.
(b) In the environment e.g. school equipment.

the demands they make upon the child to learn to read and write. Also languages differ. Furthermore, numerous other factors must be taken into account. Figure 1 is an attempt to model the child's situation when he undertakes the task of literacy acquisition.

The linguistic stimuli part of the model includes all the child's past and current language experiences. Of special concern are his own speech (which we shall call "L^1" - the first language) and the writing system which he is exposed to in the teaching of reading and writing in his classroom. The expectations of literacy responses are simply the reading and writing behaviours demanded of him by his culture, usually represented by his teacher. (These we will call "L^2" - the second language.) The non-linguistic factors are all those very many variables which impinge on the literacy learner other than those specified in the upper part of the model. If they did not exist literacy development might still take place, but they often have a powerful facilitating or handicapping influence. They may be within the individual (e.g., perceptual problems) or in the environment (e.g., school equipment).

The situation described in this model contains many potential hazards for the child. Our concern here is with those hazards that arise from cultural or linguistic mismatch, and the effect these may have on his cognitive and emotional development. The growth of cognitive clarity in the child as regards the task of learning the logical relationships between spoken and written language may be impeded by overloading his capacity for handling confusing data through three main types of mismatch:

1. Mismatch between L^1 and L^2. For example, the child's L^1 is Spanish but the teacher teaches literacy in a different L^2, English.

2. Mismatch between the child's experience of the writing system (the other part of the "linguistic stimuli" section in the model) and the L^2 of the responses demanded by his teacher. For example, the L^2 response is "cum" but the writing system codes this word come.

3. A compound of mismatches numbers 1 and 2.

But in addition these types of mismatch may occur also in respect of dialect, e.g. the child's dialect D^1 may be different from the D^2 of the responses required by his teacher.

Despite some theoretical arguments to the contrary, there is already strong empirical evidence which shows very convincingly that these mismatches are important causes of reading disability.

In the case of the gross discrepancy between L^1 and L^2 two investigations are particularly convincing. Macnamara (1966) compared (1) Irish children whose L^1 is English but who must learn initial literacy in a different L^2, Irish, with (2) English children whose L^1 and L^2 are both English. He found that:

> "Native-speakers of English in Ireland who have spent 42 per cent of their school time learning Irish do not achieve the same standard in written English as British children who have not learned a second language (estimated difference in standard, 17 months of English age). Neither do they achieve the same standard in written Irish as native speakers of Irish (estimated difference, 16 months of Irish age)."

Nancy Modiano's (1968) research in Mexico compared two groups of Indian children. The experimental group began reading in their native Indian tongue (L^1) and transferred to Spanish (L^2) reading in the second year. The control group was taught Spanish (L^2) reading only.

The experimental group scored significantly higher in reading Spanish. These results led Modiano to conclude that:

> "The youngsters of linguistic minorities learn to read with greater comprehension in the national language when they first learn to read in their mother tongue than when they receive all their reading instruction in the national language."

Modiano's finding pin-points the stage at which mismatch between L^1 and L^2 is critical. It is most important to avoid increasing cognitive confusion in the first experiences of problem solving involved in understanding the nature of the task of learning to read. If the level of cognitive confusion becomes too high for the beginner he receives a setback from which it is very difficult to recover.

At first sight, it might seem strange that learning literacy in two languages is easier than learning literacy in only one. "Surely," it might be argued, "there is more to learn in two languages than in one!" What is overlooked in this argument is the fact that literacy skills can be considered in their own right quite apart from their application in any specific language. When we have learned to speak our mother tongue, we do not have to learn how to speak all over again when we learn a foreign language. We simply transfer our speaking skills to the second language. Similarly, once we are literate in our first language of literacy we do not have to acquire literacy over again when we learn to read a second language. We need only extend our existing literacy. "Literacy is acquired once-for-all, like linguacy itself," as Mountford (1970) has shown.

Numerous speculative articles have been published on the effects of mismatch between D^1 and D^2. For example, Wolfram and Fasold (1969)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

claim: "When the child who speaks Black English is required to learn to read using Standard English materials, he is given two tasks at once: learning to read and learning a new dialect. The Standard English speaking child, by contrast, is only required to learn to read."

Empirical evidence of the harmful effects of the D^1 v D^2 mismatch has been obtained by Österberg (1961). He studied a group of Swedish children who spoke the Piteå dialect. An experimental group had their first reading materials translated into the Piteå dialect, while a control group had to use the same materials printed in Standard Swedish. The experimental group surpassed the control group not only during the initial stage but afterwards when they were transferred to reading Standard Swedish. Österberg's finding that D^1 instruction is superior in transfer to D^2 reading again shows that mismatch has its ill effects in the initial introductory phase of literacy teaching.

Our own experiments in Britain have shown the effects of the mismatch between the child's experience of the writing system and the language to which it is supposed to be related. An experimental group were taught to read in a writing system which more consistently coded the phonemes of English speech. The control group used the same instructional materials printed in the conventional orthography of English. The incidence of failure was significantly higher in the control group and this was still true after the experimental group had transferred from reading the simplified system to reading the more complex traditional orthography. This again fixes the time when it is most important to reduce the load of confusion, i.e. in the beginning stage (Downing, 1969).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Culture and Emotion

The above findings have been concerned with the cognitive reactions to linguistic mismatch. It may be objected that the topic of this conference requires more attention to be given to affective responses to cultural mismatch.

However, in real life it is very difficult to separate these two types of stimuli and these two kinds of behaviour into distinct categories. We may however, shift our focus to these other aspects.

First, there is evidence that cognitive confusion arising from these linguistic mismatches is accompanied by emotional disturbance for the more obvious reason that this confusion and failure causes frustration.

In the Swedish dialect experiment, Österberg reported that the control group of D^1 speakers who had to learn to read in D^2 became "generally unsure and their uncertainty affects their performance in lettering, articulation and reading tempo." Furthermore, their cognitive confusion gradually pollutes their total school experience, as Österberg's description of their behaviour shows:

> "Pupils have difficulty in grasping the links between extramural life and intramural work. Experiences derived in the previous environment are consciously or unconsciously pushed into the background as unfavoured phenomena. What is learned at school obtains no natural anchorage in the children's experiences and spontaneous observations. The school's study content then becomes a separate phenomenon. Progress does not proceed from the concrete, the already known. The matter assimilated becomes associated with theoretical constructions and psychic contents, which in structure and function have no roots in practical life outside the school. What is assimilated becomes the 'barely learnt,' and as a result processes of forgetting set in more readily. In the same way subjective tiredness, for instance, acquires fairly

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> wide scope and the results of schoolwork suffer generally. The school is constructing a system of study and contributing to a basis of personality development which lacks two fundamental qualities - continuity and personal integration."

Similar affects have been found in the other type of mismatch - writing system experienced versus L^2 response required by the teacher. Southgate's (1969) independent study of the schools using the simplified orthography in our experiments in Britain reported:

> "The majority of the teachers interviewed appear to consider the change in children's attitudes to reading to be at least as important, or even more important, than their increased progress in reading. Teachers' comments on children's attitudes can be summarised in this way. Children enjoy learning because of the simplicity and regularity of the alphabet; this gives them confidence so that they are eager to try; the regularity of the sound-symbol relationship means that their attempts are generally successful; and this in turn cuts out frustrations and gives them a sense of achievement."

From these observations which have been confirmed by several other studies in which the orthography has been simplified in like manner, we may conclude that the mismatch between the written language and the spoken language which it is supposed to code causes, not only failure, but also adverse attitudes to reading; loss of confidence and a poorer self image.

But there is a more complex and subtle way in which these mismatches damage the child's personality. This arises from the intimate connection between the individual's language, culture and personality. Here the focus is more properly on <u>culture</u> rather than on language as such.

Spolsky (1970) remarks that, "When reading and writing is an alien thing and associated with alien elements of the culture, it is not

surprising to find reluctance to associate them with one's most precious possession language." This cultural mismatch is aggravated when teachers regard their own D^2 "as the correct and pure version of the language, and treat any variation as corrupt or debased, or careless," Spolsky (1972) notes.

The emotional reaction to such rejection is predictable. Language is the holy of holys of culture. Therefore, to attack an individual's language is to commit an act of sacrilege on the innermost cultural sanctum of the personality. The intensely hostile resistance is only to be expected. As Tax (1965) puts it, when divergent speakers are required to correct their language: "They often cannot do what the teacher asks, things which seem to them, consciously or unconsciously to denigrate their homes, their people and their culture." Or, in Goodman's (1969) words: "But if the teacher 'corrects' the dialect-based divergent language, this is at cross purposes with the direction of growth of the child. All his past and present language experience contradicts what the teacher tells him. School becomes a place where people talk funny and teachers tell you things about your language that aren't true."

Sometimes the destructive influence of cultural clash has become so chronic that restoring the status of D^1 by making it the language of initial literacy as Österberg did in his Swedish dialect experiment may be ineffective. For instance, Wolfram and Fasold (1969) note that, "Sociolinguistic research has shown that speakers who use socially stigmatized speech forms sometimes have the same low opinion of such forms as do speakers who do not use them. As a result, even though the

Black English materials might be clearer and more natural to some, they may not be acceptable because of the presence of these stigmatized forms."

Thus in the case of Black English, its association with generations of degradation may prevent its speakers from trying the solution of giving it the dignity of a printed form. The special case of Black sub-culture is stated by Sikes (1972) as follows: "The black population in America today reflects the sufferings of the inhumanity of slavery. No other group was ripped from its home land, stripped of humanity, and sold on the market place. No other group had its family systematically separated - including mothers from children - for purposes of further psychological impact designed to further the economic benefit of the 'owners' and to facilitate subjugation."

The Black English dialects which these people developed seem to be still tainted by their origins in slavery. Chris Searle (1972) brings this out dramatically in his book, The Forsaken Lover, which describes a similar problem of culture clash in Tobago.

> "But as these new, separate nations find their independent political identies, their people still speak in a language that takes them back to the past and their subjection and exploitation through centuries of slavery and colonialism."

Searle's experience as a white teacher in black Tobago is a realization of two linguistic ambivalences in these people. They are ambivalent toward their own dialect, and ambivalent toward Standard English.

The more obvious and immediate problem is their ambivalence toward their own dialect. In their homes and on the street it is spontaneously and positively accepted, but most of the same people instantly reject

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the very thought that their homely language should be written down as prose or poetry. Standard English only deserves such dignity is the general belief. Thus, education becomes "a process of self-betrayal and alienation, in which the child assumes that the word that gave her life and sensation is beneath poetical expression, and so she must turn to another which is not hers." But Searle's book is a testimony to the fact that the other ambivalence toward Standard English is becoming increasingly conscious. More and more the realization is growing that this "proper" language is the invisible chain which still fetters the black Tobagan to England. Searle's statement is:

> "Trinidad and Tobago, with a black prime minister and a predominantly black government, but the real governor of the culture - the language - is still in control. The black man still speaks out his experience in words and symbols belonging to the white man."

These words and symbols speak against them and tell them "that 'black' is a bad word, a word of guilt and doubt and evil, but that 'white' has its associations with purity, goodness and innocence."

CONCLUSION

Our Comparative Reading investigation shows that the problem of cultural and linguistic mismatch is widespread, although at the practical level only a small beginning is being made to trying to find ways of minimising the educational difficulties it causes. In many countries the awareness that cultural and linguistic mismatch causes educational failure is quite faint. Often the official actions of such school systems appear to reflect an attitude of rejection of the child's dialect.

For example, our investigations in Britain led us to conclude that, "Where action is taken to assist immigrants in this difficulty it most often seems to take the form of teaching spoken standard English first, after which literacy is taught in relation to the acquired English as a second language. This seems to ignore the consensus of research that literacy is best taught in the first language or first dialect of the child." This attitude reflects a one way model of the educational process. A model in which the child is deficient and the child must change. On the simple grounds of efficiency and effectiveness, at least this model ought to be rejected. If our educational goals are going to be achieved with a greater degree of success the model must become more of a two way one. The educator and the school must be more ready to find themselves wrong and to adapt themselves to the reality of each child's world as the child perceives it through the child's culture and the child's own language.

REFERENCES

Downing, John: Comparative reading: A method of research and study in reading. In Figurel, J. Allen (ed.): Reading and Realism. Newark, Del., International Reading Association, 1969.

Downing, John: New experimental evidence of the effectiveness of i.t.a. in preventing disabilities of reading and spelling. Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology, 5, 547-555, 1969.

Downing, John: Comparative Reading. New York, Macmillan, 1973.

Goodman, Kenneth S.: Dialect barriers to reading comprehension. In Baratz, Joan C., and Shuy, Roger W. (eds.): Teaching Black Children to Read. Washington, D.C., Center for Applied Lingustics, 1969.

Goodman, Kenneth S.: Promises, promises. Reading Teacher, 24, 365-367, 1971.

Goody, Jack (ed.): Literacy in Traditional Societies. London, Cambridge University Press, 1968.

Husén, Torsten, and Postlethwaite. N.: Intentions and background of the project. In Husén, Torsten (ed.): International Study of Achievement in Mathematics. Stockholm, Almquist and Wiksell, 1967.

Jahoda, Gustav: Supernatural beliefs and changing cognitive structures among Ghanaian university students. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 1, 115-130, 1970.

Macnamara, John: Bilingualism and Primary Education. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1966.

Makita, K.: The rarity of reading disability in Japanese children. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 38, 599-614, 1968.

Modiano, Nancy: National or mother language in beginning reading: A comparative study. Research in the Teaching of English, 2, 32-43, 1968.

Morris, Joyce M.: Standards and Progress in Reading. Slough, Bucks., National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, 1966.

Österberg, Tore: Bilingualism and the First School Language--An Educational Problem Illustrated by Results from a Swedish Dialect Area. Umeå, Sweden, Västerbottens Tryckeri A.B., 1961.

Preston, Ralph C.: Reading achievement of German and American children. School and Society, 90, 350-354, 1962.

Ramirez III, Manuel: Towards cultural democracy in mental health: The case of the Mexican-American. Interamerican Journal of Psychology, 6, 45-50, 1972.

Searle, Chris: The Forsaken Lover. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972.

Sikes, Melvin P.: Community mental health and community psychology: A Black's perspective. Interamerican Journal of Psychology, 6, 131-134, 1972.

Southgate, Vera: i.t.a. in practice: Evidence from interviews. In Warburton, F.W., and Southgate, Vera: i.t.a.: An Independent Evaluation (The Schools Council report). London: Chambers and Murray, 1969.

Spolsky, Bernard: Literacy in the Vernacular: The Navajo Reading Study. Paper presented at the 69th Annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, San Diego, California, November 19, 1970.

Spolsky, Bernard: Linguistics and the languge barrier to education. In Sebeok, Thomas A., et al (eds.): Current Trends in Linguistics Vol. XII. The Hague, Mouton, 1972.

Tax, S.: Group identity and educating the disadvantaged. Language Programs for the Disadvantaged. Champaign, Ill., National Council of Teachers of English, 1965.

Wolfram, Walt, and Fasold, R. W.: Toward reading materials for speakers of Black English: Three linguistically appropriate passages. In Baratz, Joan C., and Shuy, Roger W.(eds.): Teaching Black Children to Read. Washington, D. C., Center for Applied Linguistics, 1969.